

John Kidd

The life and legacy of a settler in Upper Canada



By Shantel Ivits



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By Shantel Ivits

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Dedicated to Ruby & Beckett

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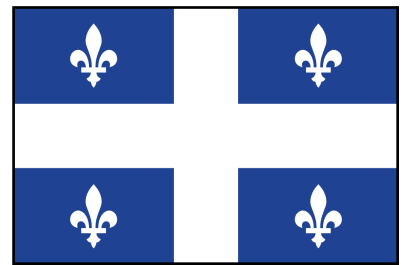
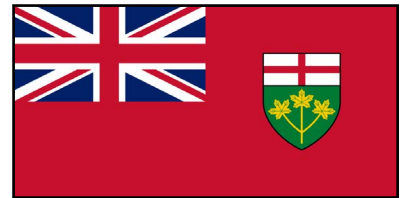
Preface

Growing up in Southern Ontario in the 1980s and 90s, I remember seeing a lot in the news about land claim disputes between First Nations and the Canadian government.

I remember hearing about the Kanesatake Resistance, also known as “the Oka Crisis,” when I was seven years old. The town of Oka, Quebec wanted to expand a golf course onto a Mohawk community's burial grounds. Members of the Mohawk community of Kanesatake created a blockade to prevent construction workers from bulldozing this sacred site. When Quebec’s provincial police officers moved in to dismantle their blockade, gunfire was exchanged, resulting in the death of a police officer. This led to increased racial tensions between Indigenous people and settlers.

At seven years old, I didn’t see how anyone could defend building a golf course on a graveyard in the first place. Why were the Canadian government, military, and police so stuck on this golf course? I figured I must just be too young to understand.

I was 12 when Ipperwash started to make newspaper headlines. The Canadian government had taken away reserve land from the Chippewas of Stony Point First Nation in the 1940s for use as a military base. The government promised they would give the land back, but they didn’t. In 1995, following repeated requests for the land to be returned, members of the Stony Point First Nation occupied part of the land in protest. The Ontario Provincial Police came in once again to remove the protestors. That’s when a police officer shot and killed a First Nations man named Dudley George.



I continued to wonder what I was missing. If you break a promise, doesn't that mean you're in the wrong? Why did the government send in the police instead of returning the land like they'd promised? Again, I figured I must be too young to get it.

To be honest, I didn't worry too much about these things back then. I felt disconnected from them. It all felt too complicated. That changed the more I grew interested in the story of the lands I've called home. I like to hear stories that answer questions like: Who has stood here before me? What was their life like? What events have happened here? How does all that history connect with me? And I like to imagine: what could the future here look like?

In school, I was told stories that answered these questions from a Euro-Canadian perspective. I wasn't taught much about the Indigenous history of this land until I became a university student. In the decades that followed, I continued to participate in workshops, read books, watch films, and just talk to people to learn more. The more I learned, the more I appreciated my childhood sense of right and wrong.



Even still, I wasn't sure how Indigenous history, Canadian history, and my own personal history connected in a nuanced way. So when I sat down one day to write a history of one of my maternal ancestors, I was compelled to try to weave those three pieces together.

I focused on the story of my great-great-great-grandfather. His 97-year lifetime spanned from the early settlement of Upper Canada through to the decades after Confederation. His life became a powerful lens for thinking about Canadian history in much more personal terms. I began to see how I'm directly connected to things I've read about in history textbooks and the news, including the events in Oka and Ipperwash. This perspective helped me better understand my own place in the ongoing story of Canada.

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The Year John was Born

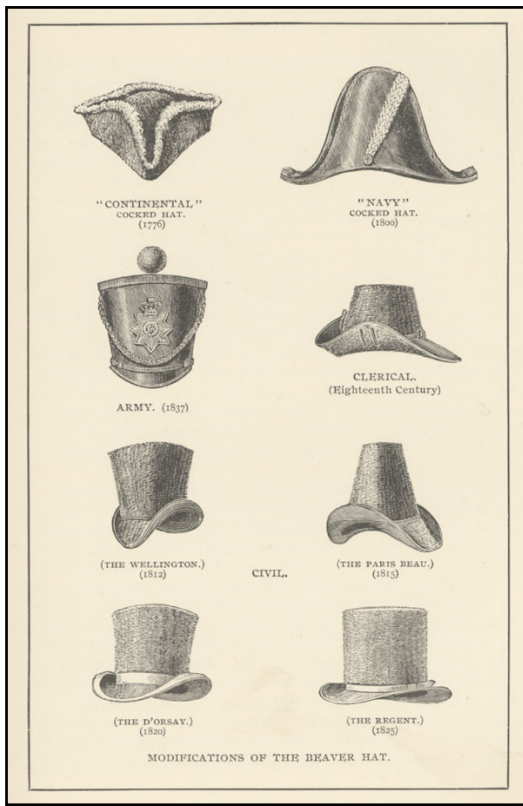
My great-great-great-great grandfather, Joseph Kidd, was a beaver hat maker in County Wexford, Ireland in the late 1700s. Each day, he worked in the modest workshop adjoining his home, surrounded by the tools of his trade: combs and brushes, shears and knives, irons and hat blocks, and stacks and stacks of beaver pelts. These pelts traveled from the vast forests of North America, traversing rivers by canoe, crossing the ocean by ship, and finally arriving by horse-drawn wagon to his workshop in Donishall. He didn't know it at the time, but one day he would make this same journey in reverse.

Joseph cleaned each pelt and then sheared the coarse outer hairs, leaving only the soft underfur behind. He applied a treatment of mercury nitrate to encourage the fibres to mat together. Then he pounded, kneaded, folded and combed the wet pelt to produce felt. He skillfully stretched, molded, ironed, and cut the felt over round wooden blocks until it took the shape of a hat. Depending on the style he was making that day, he might sew on a brim. Finally, he would apply the finishing touches—a ribbon or other decorative element—before placing the hat on a shelf, ready to catch the eye of potential customers.

Joseph had learned his craft from George Poole in nearby Gorey and then married George's daughter, Anne. Now he supported his wife and their three children with a hatting shop of his very own. But his workshop would go up in flames in 1798, and not by accident.

To understand why someone would deliberately set fire to Joseph's workshop, it's important to know that the Kidd family were Anglicans and Loyalists - that is, people loyal to the British monarchy. The Kidds originated from the Yorkshire Dales in England. Joseph's ancestors had been English sheep farmers, wool merchants, weavers, and clothiers for centuries.

In the 1500s, England began forcibly taking land from their Irish neighbours. They needed Loyalists from England to settle on the confiscated land to help solidify England's dominance over Ireland.



In the early 1600s, Joseph's ancestors moved from England to Dublin for this very purpose. This process is known as colonization, and taking land was just the first step. The British colonizers created regulations to privilege the Anglican Loyalists over the local Irish Catholic population. For example, only Anglicans could hold influential positions in Irish politics, the law, and the military. Anglicans could vote, own land, and attend university without the restrictions imposed on their Irish Catholic neighbours. The goal was to suppress the Irish Catholics, and ultimately build a rich and powerful empire in the name of the British Crown.

How did settlers justify their involvement in colonization? They convinced themselves that they were superior to the people whose lands they took. They viewed the British Empire as a bearer of progress, enlightenment, and spiritual salvation.

This narrative provided a convenient rationale for exploiting other people's land, resources, and labour for the benefit of both the British monarchy and themselves. In reality, British colonization didn't uplift colonized peoples, it caused tremendous inequality and other harms: loss of life, land, culture, and language. And it almost always led to violent resistance by those who had been oppressed.



1818 Map of the British Isles

In 1798, Irish Catholics rose in rebellion to try and reclaim control of their country. Rebel forces began rounding up Anglican men, women, and children and imprisoning them in a farmhouse in Scullabogue, Wexford. When the rebels reached Donishall, Joseph and his family sought refuge with some neighbours in a haystack. The neighbours feared that Joseph's infant daughter might cry and betray their hiding place. They urged that she be silenced permanently to ensure their survival. Joseph and Anne refused to comply with such a grim suggestion. Thankfully, their

daughter remained quiet, and the group managed to evade capture. Despite their escape, Joseph and Anne's home was sacked and set ablaze, along with Joseph's workshop.

Leaving their home in ashes behind them, they relocated to Carnew, County Wicklow to start over. On a trip to the Vale of Avoca, their next son, my great-great-great-grandfather John, was born. For the Kidd family, his birth was a light in the otherwise dark year of 1798.



Illustration of a house being sacked and burned in the 1798 uprisings



Map of Ireland in 1822

Early Life

Following the Rebellion of 1798, the British military and police took severe measures against the rebels, amplifying the social unrest for centuries to come. Meanwhile, the Loyalist Anglicans who'd lost their homes and businesses were compensated by the British government. Back in Carnew, Joseph and Anne had several more children, bringing the total to eight.

John's childhood was marked by a complex mix of privilege and adversity. As an Anglican, his family had a more secure economic footing than their Catholic neighbours. However, Ireland struggled year after year with poor harvests, leading to food shortages. In turn, the price of basic staples increased. Combined with ongoing rent hikes, the cost of living soared. The demand for fashionable apparel, like Joseph's beaver hats, began to wane. Community life continued to be haunted by the deep hostility between Anglicans and Catholics, which often erupted into violence. The future in Ireland felt bleak.

As John entered adulthood, newspapers began printing advertisements for emigration. England's empire building mission had stretched to North America. More Loyalist settlers were needed to strengthen England's foothold in Upper Canada. The ads touted the prospect of land ownership, more economic opportunities, and better living conditions. Then letters began arriving from neighbours who'd successfully emigrated. Neighbours who'd once been paying the steep cost of rent in Ireland now owned 200 acres in Upper Canada, or more if they had sons. This was enough space to grow their own food and have leftovers to sell. The land had enough timber to build a log cabin and heat it with firewood for many winters to come. And the land was far enough away to be safe from the constant violence plaguing Wexford and Wicklow.

At the age of 24, John decided to emigrate to Upper Canada alongside his older brother Thomas. If life turned out as good as the advertisements suggested, Joseph and the rest of the family would eventually join them.

Voyage Across the Atlantic

John and Thomas Kidd bid farewell to their parents and siblings and set out for the port of Dublin in 1822. The young men took a small ship to Liverpool, where they then boarded a wooden clipper with towering masts and soaring sails, hefty enough to transport them across 3,500km of open ocean. It would be anywhere from forty days to three months before they set foot on land again.

The voyage was full of risk. The ship navigated around icebergs through frequent storms and fog. The brothers travelled as steerage passengers, living in cramped quarters below the deck where there was no privacy, poor sanitation, and very limited

water and food rations. It was dark and poorly ventilated. Cholera outbreaks were common and deadly. They passed the time with storytelling, singing, and improvised games, but the days were long and monotonous nonetheless. Thoughts of a new, more prosperous life kept them going.

Whoops of joy erupted when the Grand Banks of Newfoundland were finally in view. The ship sailed onwards into the Gulf of St Lawrence, navigating narrow passages, shifting sandbanks, and submerged rocks. It sailed past Anticosti Island and the Gaspé Peninsula into the narrowing mouth of the St Lawrence River, finally casting anchor in Quebec City.



An
Emigrant
Ship,
Dublin Bay

Passage Down the St Lawrence

Quebec City, a previously French colony, was now under British rule and part of a broader region known as Lower Canada. The port was bustling, with goods being transported between the warehouses on shore and the countless ships in port. The shore was dotted with white houses and punctuated with the occasional church spire. Beyond that, lush green forests gave rise to rolling hills in the background.

The exhausted brothers climbed into rowboats and were taken into quarantine on Grosse Île. The scene here was decidedly less enchanting. The island was peppered with tents and sheds reminiscent of cattle pens, housing deathly ill cholera patients.

Those emigrants that died in quarantine met their final repose in nearby mass graves. The brothers underwent medical examinations and their belongings were sanitized. Aside from that, quarantining was - for the healthy - a surprisingly raucous event with evenings of singing, dancing, drinking, shouting - and guarding one's few belongings from theft. People were brimming with optimism about their futures in a colony where they could easily own hundreds of acres of land, something unthinkable in their homeland.

Following days of quarantining, the brothers boarded a steamship for Montreal. From there, they set out on a smaller boat for Leeds County in Upper Canada.



Settlement in Leeds County

From the 1780s to the early 1800s, the government purchased almost all of the land in Upper Canada that was suitable for agriculture in order to create British settlements. To do this, it made several treaties with the local First Nations, mainly the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (formerly known as the Iroquois).

Earlier agreements between the British and First Nations had been about forming alliances, but these treaties were now about purchasing land. Land was viewed very differently by each culture. From a British perspective, land was a commodity that could be bought and sold. From an Indigenous perspective, there was no concept of land as a commodity. Land couldn't be owned, it could only be jointly taken care of. For this reason, serious questions remain about whether these treaties were signed with free and informed consent. Keep in mind that the treaties were also written in English, but the Indigenous Chiefs who signed them usually had limited ability to speak English, let alone read or write in the language. They had to rely on interpreters provided by the British who had a vested interest in getting those treaties signed. What's more, the compensation promised in the treaties was usually much lower than the value of the land. This approach to making contracts would be

considered just as unethical and legally questionable then as it is today.

It was in this context that land was granted by the British Crown to settlers from America, England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Leeds County is on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (particularly the Mohawk nation) and the Anishinaabe. The Mohawk had to relocate elsewhere, including the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, as well as Kahnawake and Kanesatake in Quebec (which would later be involved in "the Oka Crisis"). The Anishinaabe also had to relocate elsewhere, including reserves at the Credit River, Scugog Island, Alderville, Curve Lake and Hiawatha.



Location of Indigenous Reserves in 2024

Leeds County was the destination of choice for many Irish settlers from Wexford, like the Kidds. Loyalists who had fought for Britain during the American Revolution had begun to establish settlements in Leeds, such as Lansdowne and Gananoque. First, the brothers homesteaded near Wiltse Lake, Front of Yonge Township. The area was mostly wilderness at the time, so they only had themselves and a small handful of neighbours to rely on. They lived near an older widow named Ann Morris who had brought her children from Wexford to Upper Canada after her husband passed away. She couldn't legally own land, but her only son Henry could. Henry was close in age to John. The families became good friends and supported each other as they started their new lives. Life in the backwoods would have been difficult, but it was sufficiently better than life in Ireland that two years later John and Thomas' parents and most of their siblings came to join them by Wiltse Lake.

In 1826, John and Thomas cut a road from the Lansdowne settlement on the St Lawrence River to Outlet, a settlement on Charleston Lake. It was called Kidd Road and still bears that name to this day. Shortly afterward, Thomas purchased two lots near Outlet, on the shores of Mud Bay, Charleston Lake (Concession 7, lots 15 and 16; today part of Charleston Lake Provincial Park). As the first European settler on this land, he cleared the trees from the lot and built a farm. Thomas married the Morris widow's oldest daughter, also named Ann, and together they had several children.

Still a bachelor, John stayed on at Wiltse Lake with his parents and siblings. In 1825, his father, Joseph purchased 1000 acres in faraway Airlie, Simcoe County, from neighbours in Leeds. However, Joseph and his wife, Anne, would never set eyes on that 1000 acres. They may have been making their way towards this land when they relocated to York (now Toronto), but that's where Joseph died in 1828. He is buried in St. John's York Mills Anglican Cemetery. Joseph didn't have a will, leaving the land in Airlie in legal limbo.

Around 1830, John married Jane Morris (another of the Morris widow's daughters). They had a son whom they named Joseph, in memory of John's recently deceased father. In 1831, John purchased two lots on the shores of Grassy Bay, Charleston Lake, right next to Thomas and Ann (Concession 7, lots 17 and 18). He and Jane lived here for about a decade and had several more children: George, John Jr, Thomas, Jane, Henry and Ann.



Jane Kidd (née Morris)

A Business Venture

A pair of merchants in Gananoque approached John and Thomas with a business venture. They wanted help transporting agricultural products and merchandise between Gananoque and the more remote settlements in the backwoods. John and Thomas had likely already been doing this trek for their own supplies and were up to the challenge. John had two batteaux, flat-bottomed boats that were sharp at both ends like a canoe. The batteaux were about forty feet long and six feet wide, had a mast and rectangular sail, and would have been paddled by a crew of around four men, plus a pilot who steered. The first boat would do a run up the Gananoque River to a mill at Marble Rock. The second boat would travel from Marble Rock across Wiltse Creek to Outlet, and across the waters of

Charleston Lake to the settlement of Charleston. Then they'd go back the opposite way. While the boats were mostly powered by oars, sometimes horses would have to pull the boats along parts of Wiltse Creek. This arrangement lasted for years and played an important role in the development of Charleston and the surrounding area.



Grassy Point, Charleston Lake



A Map of Leeds County (stars denote places mentioned in text)

Politics in Upper Canada

The energetic Kidd brothers became notable citizens in Lansdowne Township, but Upper Canada as a whole was largely run by a small, unelected group of men centered in Toronto called the Family Compact. These wealthy conservative men controlled the political, economic, and judicial systems and in order to preserve their own power, they staunchly opposed democracy. Members of the Family Compact were loyal to the British Crown and followers of the Anglican Church.

Many residents of Upper Canada were fed up with this unequal state of affairs, leading to an insurrection known as the Upper Canada Rebellion. The Kidd family had long been loyal to the British Crown and were also members of the Anglican Church, so perhaps it's no surprise they sided with the Family Compact over the rebels - even though this stance was against their own interests. The rebellion was unsuccessful and many of the rebels relocated to the United States and began plotting their next steps.

In 1838, an American group called the Hunter Patriots began secretly plotting from the northern border states to seize Prescott in neighbouring Grenville County. From Prescott they planned to launch further attacks to overthrow the British government

in Upper Canada and turn it into a republic (much like the rebels in the United States and France had done, and the Irish had wanted to do). Little did they know, the British had infiltrated their organization and knew the attack was coming. They mobilized their military and a number of civilian-led militias. John and Thomas helped organize men into militias to prepare for the pending attack. Thomas was given the rank of Captain (and would subsequently become known as "Captain Kidd") and John was made an officer of unknown rank.

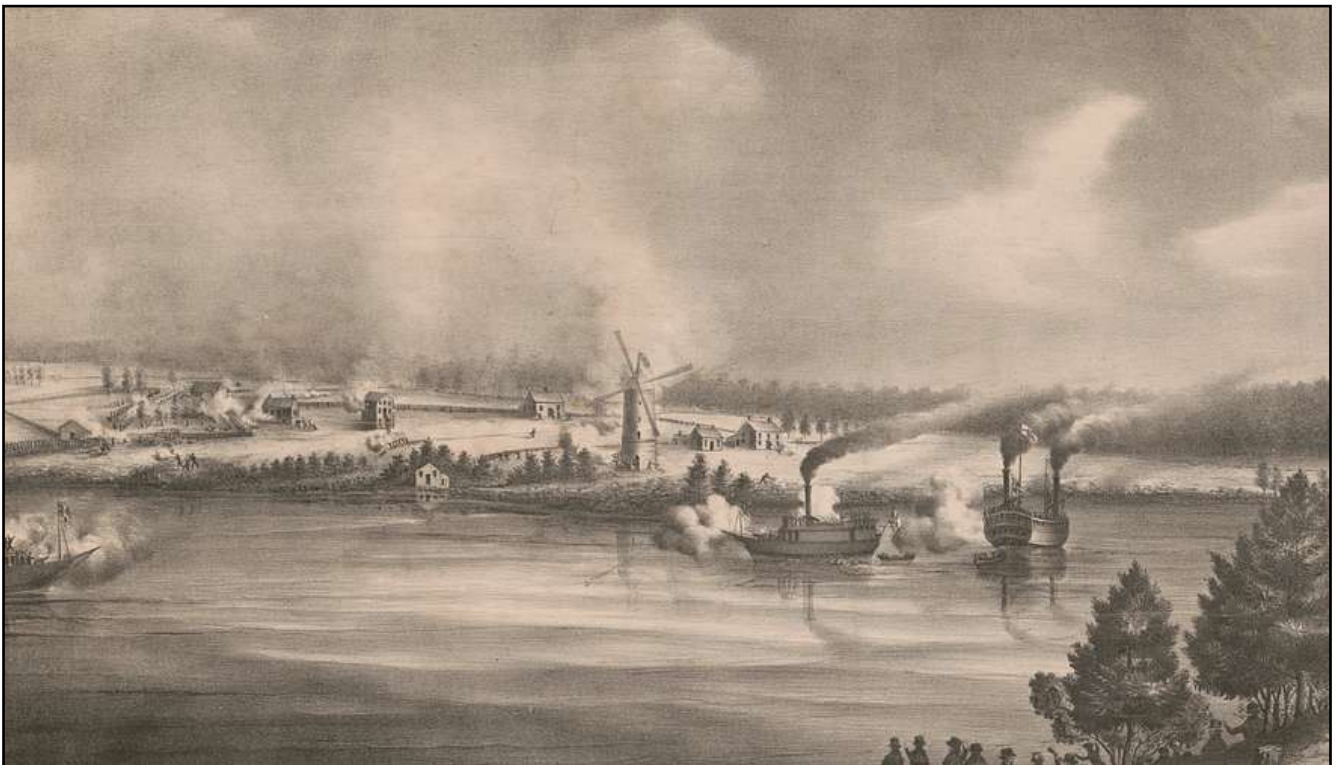
In November 1838, the Hunter Patriots attacked Upper Canada in what is now called the Battle of the Windmill. The British military and local townspeople were ready. John and his men were in charge of defending Hickory Island, just off the coast of Wolfe Island near Kingston. Fortunately, they didn't see much action on Hickory Island, but Thomas and his men were engaged directly near Prescott. The battle lasted several days, and the rebels were repelled in the end. Prescott remained in British hands.

Political figures back in Britain grew concerned about the discontent in Upper Canada. They commissioned Lord Durham to investigate and write a report. The Durham Report paved the way for merging Lower and Upper Canada into the Province of Canada in

1841. The Report also pushed the cause of democracy, calling for the creation of governments elected by and for the people. This change would start to be implemented over the next decade, but the right to vote wouldn't be extended to all Canadian citizens until 1960, almost a century later, when Indigenous people were finally included in the right to vote.

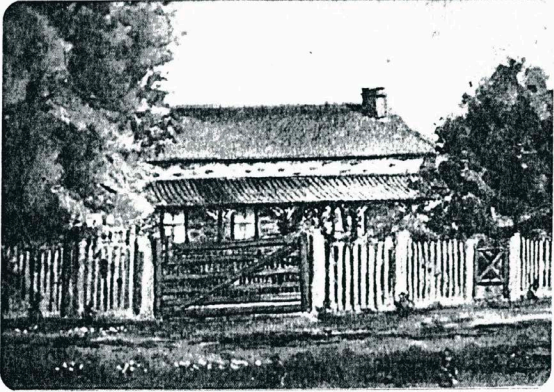
The rebellions entrenched a cultural divide in Leeds County between the earlier established American-origin settlers and the later-arriving Wexford settlers. The Wexford

settlers saw themselves as more sophisticated and industrious. They were suspicious that the American-origin settlers were sympathetic to the rebel forces that had been trying to overthrow the government of Upper Canada. They formed Orangemen societies to defend British values, such as Protestantism and loyalty to the Crown. Meanwhile, the American-origin settlers thought the Wexford settlers acted overly-entitled to power and feared being turned into an under-class. The tensions in Upper Canada were beginning to bear some resemblance to the troubles back in Ireland.



Battle of the Windmill

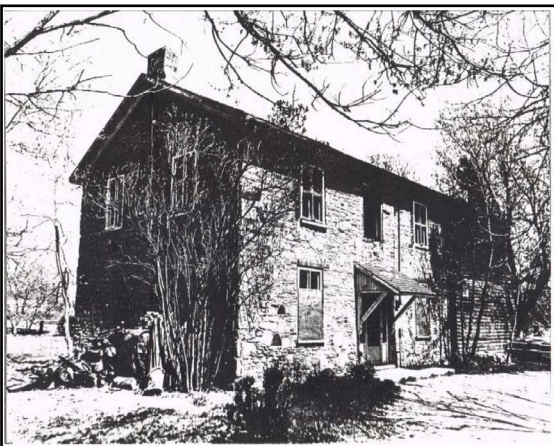
Settlement in Mono Mills



John Kidd's House in the late 1800s



John's Stone House & Tavern in 2024



The Albion Hotel

Around 1841, John and Jane moved their family westward. John submitted a claim to the land Joseph had purchased in Airlie many years ago but the claim was put on pause until he could produce a will. Since a will didn't exist, he settled in Mono Mills instead. This village is perched on the Niagara Escarpment, a region with dramatic ridges and valleys and dense forests. It is the traditional territory of the Tionontati, Attawandaron, Haudenosaunee, and Anishinaabe peoples. John built a frame house and a farm on a hill overlooking the village of Mono Mills. Here he and Jane had three more children.

Settlers' homes at the time took the form of shanties, log cabins, frame houses, stone houses, or brick houses, depending on the owner's wealth. About ten years later, John & Jane replaced their frame house with a one-and-a-half story stone house, most of which still stands at 19563 Airport Road over 170 years later. It is now a designated heritage house.

John found he could make good money distilling whiskey. He eventually turned part of his home into a tavern. Proceeds from his farm and tavern enabled him to purchase the Albion Hotel. He also bought back the land his father had originally purchased in Airlie and gifted it to four of his sons: Joseph, John Jr (my great- great-grandfather), Henry, and William. Each son cleared his land and established his own farm.

John and his son George helped raise St John's Anglican Church in 1867, which still stands at 6 Simcoe Street. Finally, John built a new house with a store front, where he would live out his later years. Part of this home still stands at 19796 Airport Rd. The old stone house on the hill went to his son, Thomas.

Mono Mills reached the height of its prosperity in the 1870s. Home to about 500 residents, the village had four mills, several stores, multiple hotels, four churches, two blacksmiths, a post office, a school, a butchery, a cheese factory, a saddlery and harness making shop, a wagon and carriage making business, and a sash and door factory.

However, the town was struck a blow when a newly established rail line stopped in Orangeville instead of Mono Mills. Orangeville quickly prospered while Mono Mills' economy declined.



John's Second House in 2024



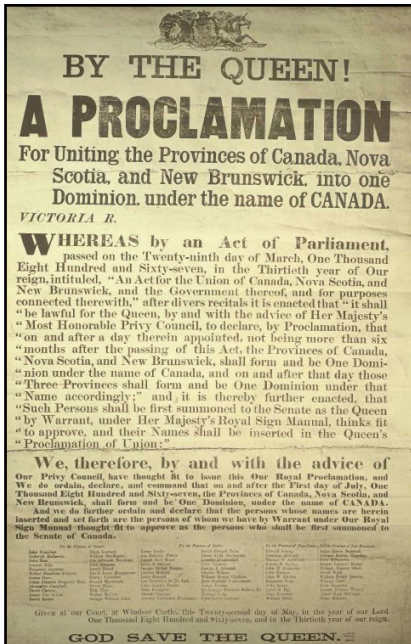
Mono Mills around 1900

After Confederation

On July 1, 1867, several of the British colonies in North America joined together, marking the event well-known as Confederation. The land previously referred to as the Province of Canada was divided into two provinces, Ontario and Quebec. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick also became provinces. Together, these four provinces formed the new Dominion of Canada. Over the next five years, the Northwest Territories (which at that time included Alberta and Saskatchewan), Manitoba, British Columbia, and Prince Edward Island would follow suit.

Part of the goal of Confederation was to significantly increase European settlement across Canada to prevent American expansion, keeping the land in British hands. Indigenous people, who were once heavily relied upon as partners in survival, trade, and war, were now seen by the colonial government as standing in the way of Euro-Canadian nation building. So in 1876, the Canadian government passed the Indian Act.

This Act legally formalized the reserve system that the British Crown had started developing in the 1790s. Indigenous communities that had originally lived on the lands that the Kidds and other European families settled were forced onto small, less desirable tracts of land. For example, several reserves in Ontario are on tiny islands: Christian Island in Georgian Bay, Parry Island in Georgian Bay, Georgina Island in Lake Simcoe, Fox Island in the Kawartha Lakes, Sugar Island in Rice Lake, and Cornwall Island in the St Lawrence River. The land was often too small to support traditional lifestyles based on hunting, gathering, and fishing. The best agricultural land had been reserved for European settlers, so the Indigenous reserve lands were not often suited to farming. The government considered the reserves to be Crown land and



heavily restricted how it could be used in relation to logging, mining, and resource extraction. In effect, the reserve system forced generations of Indigenous families into lives of poverty.

While the government supported communities of white settlers to build infrastructure like roads, schools, and healthcare facilities, the same level of support was not available to Indigenous reserves, creating dramatically different living conditions comparable to apartheid.

The Indian Act of 1876 also made it mandatory for Indigenous children to attend Indian Residential Schools. These schools had existed since the 1820s, but now children were forcibly removed from their parents, sometimes by RCMP officers, and taken to the boarding schools. The goal was to suppress Indigenous cultures and languages in order to assimilate future generations into Euro-Canadian culture. The government thought that if they could assimilate Indigenous peoples, then they wouldn't have to uphold the treaties they had made.

Sexual, physical, and emotional abuse were rampant in these schools. The living conditions were poor and the food was often inadequate. As a result, over 6000 children never returned to their families. They died in these schools and many were buried in the school yard without so much as a stone to mark their graves. This horrific abuse of human rights went on for over a century.



House on Reserve in Pikangikum, Ontario



Residential School in Brantford, Ontario



The Kidd Vault



In 1892, John had a crypt built in Mono Mills in the style of ‘the old country.’ The crypt was a 12 x 12 foot vault dug into the side of a hill. The entrance was guarded by a wooden door, behind which was a locked iron door. John had a stone erected on top of the crypt in his son George’s memory. George was killed in a horse-related accident at the age of 52. John’s daughter Ann, who had died at the age of 12, was exhumed from her original burial place and also entombed in the crypt. Her smaller gravestone was placed on the hill above, where it still rests.

John’s wife, Jane died in 1893, aged 82. At the cost of \$1000, John erected a seven-foot stone monument atop the family crypt and engraved Jane’s name on it. The Orangeville Sun declared it to be the grandest in the county. John also had two lead caskets shipped all the way from Ireland. The caskets were unique in that they had a window that could be opened, revealing the face of the deceased underneath. Jane was placed in one of these caskets before being laid to rest inside the vault. John saved the second casket for himself, and in the meantime he proudly displayed it in his living room. Perhaps this is part of why he was considered to be somewhat eccentric.

The year Jane died, a massive fire roared through Mono Mills, destroying much of the village. After that, eighty percent of the residents moved away, but John stayed in Mono Mills until his final days.

Scandal

In the final year of his life, on August 29, 1894, John caused an international stir by marrying a 16-year-old girl by the name of Gertie Robbins. They had met but three times before becoming husband and wife. Family lore suggests the 97 year old man may have had dementia, a poorly understood concept at the time, and was being taken advantage of by his teenage bride. This was already Gertie's second marriage.

The scandal, which was reported in newspapers near and far, only escalated when a fight broke out between Gertie's family and one of John's sons. Gertie deserted her husband days after the wedding to take up with another man, Constable Tom Smith.

John wrote Gertie out of his will, and left her with the token amount of "one shilling," a colloquial term for roughly 10 cents.

The papers subsequently announced that John was applying for a divorce from his young bride. Women as far away as Missouri and Colorado heard John Kidd was an eligible bachelor once again and wrote him letters bearing offers of marriage. The following letter arrived from Kansas City, dated November 29, 1894:

Dear Sir,

Would you care to correspond with a lady of "twice sixteen?" – a lady educated, refined, and of high social standing, who would gladly devote the rest of her life to making you happy?

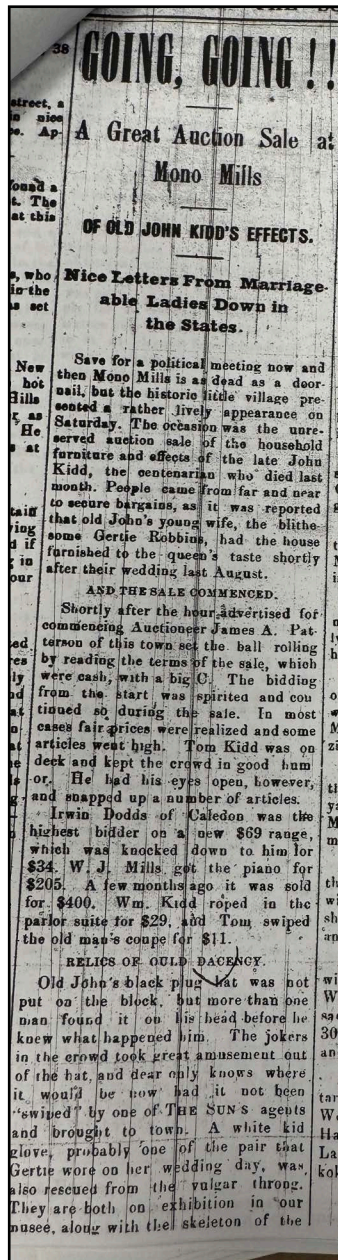
Apropos of your name, have you any relatives in Virginia?

Very respectfully,

"Homeless."

Another letter arrived from Aspen, dated December 3, 1894, in which a widowed Mrs F.C. Zigler also offered her hand in marriage. Nonetheless, John remained a bachelor. Unfortunately, of all the events in his storied life, his scandalous marriage to Gertie is the one for which he would primarily be remembered.

John's Death and Estate



After three weeks of illness, John died on March 27, 1895 at the age of 97. He was laid to rest in his lead casket and placed in the Kidd vault. His name was added to the large stone originally dedicated to Jane. Upon his death, his estate was worth an eye-popping \$15,000 (equivalent to roughly half a million dollars by today's standards). An estate auction was held and people travelled from far and wide, having heard that he'd outfitted his home to suit the tastes of the Queen in order to please his 16-year-old bride. The auction was by all accounts a lively affair, with his son Tom keeping the crowd entertained. The dead man's hat was repeatedly placed upon unsuspecting people's heads for laughs.

Unhappy with her single shilling, Gertie sued John's estate for \$5000. The *Dufferin Advertiser* reported that the trial courtroom was packed with spectators "as some very spicy developments were expected." Many witnesses showed up in favour of the deceased, ready to attest to Gertie's desertion of her husband, as well as her adultery. But since the divorce had not been completed before John died, the judge was uninterested in Gertie's dirty deeds and awarded her the \$5000.

Fourteen months after John's death, Gertie gave birth to a baby boy whom she claimed was John's son. No one was convinced, and she didn't manage to get any more of John's sizeable estate. The proceeds of the rest of John's estate went to his actual children.

The Promised Land

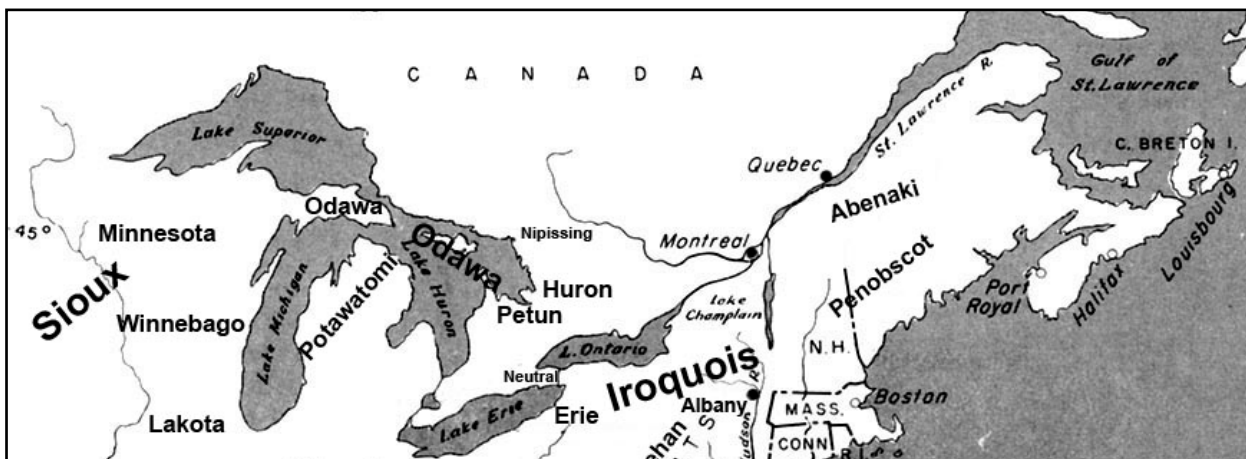
The land in Airlie that John had gifted to his four sons had a long history before the Kidd family called it home. This land had sustained the lives of the Tionontati (also known as the Petun in French or the Tobacco in English) and the closely-related Huron-Wendat since time immemorial.

At the time of European contact, the Tionontati had about 10 known villages around the Niagara escarpment, including near present-day Creemore and Banda. The Huron-Wendat had about 20 known villages near present day Penetanguishene, Orillia, and Wasaga Beach. The territory surrounding the villages was used for hunting, trapping, fishing, harvesting, travelling, and trading. They moved their villages within this territory every 10-15 years to allow the soil and forests to replenish.

In the early 1600s, European explorers, traders, and settlers introduced new diseases that these communities had no immunity to: small pox, measles, and influenza. The results were catastrophic. In just a few decades, well over half of the Huron-Wendat and Tionontati populations fell ill and died. The communities were devastated.

The Haudenosaunee (formerly known as Iroquois) to the southeast had also suffered catastrophic losses from European diseases. In order to re-strengthen their nation, they raided culturally similar nations with the intention of killing their most powerful leaders and adopting the rest of the community into their own. They believed that by merging all the nations into one, they could establish universal peace.

The Huron-Wendat and Tionontati were in no position to defend themselves from the Haudenosaunee's plan. Following the raids,



Map of First Nations Around the Great Lakes in 1649

several thousand did join the Haudenosaunee. However, some Huron-Wendat and Tionontati merged with each other and fled in different directions. One group took refuge near Quebec City, founding the community of Wendake. Another group went south and formed the Wyandot people who were forced onto reserves in Michigan, Oklahoma, and Kansas.

With the Tionontati and Huron-Wendat dispersed, our present-day family land was then used by the Haudenosaunee for hunting, trapping, travelling, and trading. But before long, a new group of families moved in. Around the 1650s, the Ojibwe (also known as the Chippewa) arrived. They had traditionally lived around the Great Lakes in Northern Ontario, Michigan, and Wisconsin. They were part of a larger Anishinaabe group called the Three Fires Confederacy,



Huron-Wendat Residents of Wendake, Quebec

which also included the Odawa and Potawatomi. The Ojibwe and their allies drove the Haudenosaunee back to their traditional territory in the south and east. By the late 1600's the Ojibwe became the largest Indigenous presence in the rest of present-day Ontario.

With the arrival of Europeans, the Ojibwe's traditional way of life was significantly disrupted. Their livelihoods had become increasingly dependent on the fur trade. However, by the early 1800s, the beaver was nearly extinct, beaver hats were going out of style, and the fur trade was coming to an end.

Their territory was also being encroached upon by tidal waves of European settlers, both British and the American. This put pressure on the Ojibwe to form alliances with colonial powers for cooperation and protection. When the United States invaded Upper Canada in 1812, the Ojibwe agreed to fight on the side of the British. In exchange, the British government promised to respect Indigenous sovereignty and help protect their land from American settlement. It didn't take the government long to break that promise.

In 1818, the government wrote up the Nottawasaga Purchase. It outlined the purchase of 1.592 million acres from the Ojibwe, a parcel that included our present-day family land. In exchange, the government promised the Ojibwe an annual sum of 1200 pounds in perpetuity. That's about 1 pound per 1327 acres of land, which most people

would consider a grift even at that time. The Ojibwe didn't fully understand what they were agreeing to in the Nottawasaga Purchase. They didn't have any input into the agreement and they didn't really have a choice about whether or not to sign it. The Ojibwe families in the area were relocated to small reserves in Rama, Christian Island, and Georgina Island. The treaty land was then divided into townships, concessions, and lots and sold to British settlers.

Nine years after the Nottawasaga Purchase, Joseph Kidd got a very good deal on 1000 acres of land near Airlie and that land has been in the Kidd family ever since. The properties straddled the townline separating Mulmur and Tosorontio townships. When Joseph died, the property taxes went unpaid so it became Crown land again. John Kidd repurchased the same land and gifted it to four of his sons, including John Jr.



Sketch of Chief Yellow Head's Encampment (one of the signatories of the Nottawasaga Treaty)



John Kidd Jr (1833-1917)



Ellen (Little) Kidd (1840-1924)

John Jr was the first white settler on his acreage. He worked to make a homestead suitable for starting a family. This involved felling the trees by axe and removing the stumps with the help of horses and a stump puller. The horses then drew a wooden plough over the land to prepare the soil for planting staples like corn, wheat, and potatoes.

The brothers helped each other build their log cabins. They notched the ends of logs so they would fit together to form the corners of the cabin. Then they stacked the logs horizontally to form a rectangular structure. Gaps between the logs were filled with clay, mud, moss, and straw. The roof, doors, and windows were added last.

Once John Jr's homestead was operational and he had the means to support a family, he was considered ready for marriage. In 1863, John Jr married Ellen Little, whose father Captain John Little was known as "the Father of the Township of Mulmur." The Little family used to walk 24 kilometres from Rosemont to the church in Mono Mills, so John and Ellen's parents likely knew each other from church. Ellen made a quilt for her wedding which is now preserved in the archives of the Museum of Dufferin County.

The couple had 12 children, including my great grandfather, Sibbald Kidd. The large family was sustained through a combination of farming, hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering fruits, nuts, and berries, and bartering with neighbours for other necessities.

John and Ellen retired to Everett in 1904, handing the homestead down to their youngest son, Sibbald Kidd. When John Jr died, he was described in his obituary as “a sturdy type of man possessing all the characteristics of mind and the tireless energy of the successful pioneer to whom this country owes a great debt.”

He and Ellen were buried in a small pioneer cemetery in Rosemont on land the Little family had donated for a church after they grew tired of walking the 24 kilometres to Mono Mills. Our family saved a small stone from that church before it was demolished, and it hangs on the wall in my grandfather’s den.



Quilt by Ellen Kidd in 1863

Sibbald remained a bachelor until 1912, when he married Mabel McMullen. Together they had five children: Norman, Roberta (who died as an infant), Dorothy, Alan, and Ena. They continued to operate the family farm and replaced the log cabin with a brick house in 1920. They were one of the few families in the region to have a dog-powered butter churn, which their dog, Jack, was reportedly not very fond of. They also had a large dinner bell on their property that they rang every day at 11am and 4pm so all the farmers in the area knew it was time to eat.



Sib and Mabel Kidd's House

Sib promised his land to his youngest son, Alan Kidd (my grandfather). For this reason, Alan dubbed it, "The Promised Land." On that land, Alan and his wife Marie (my grandmother) raised their eight children, including their youngest, my mother Frances Jane Kidd. Upon retiring from farming, they sold the original house and kept a large portion of the land to build a new house. Alan affixed the name "The Promised Land" to the front of his home.



Sibbald and Mabel Kidd



Sibbald & Mabel Kidd, Alan & Marie Kidd, Myrtle & Bob Coe

It's remarkable that to this day my grandma, mom, and uncle live on the same land once purchased by Joseph & Anne Kidd in 1825, reclaimed by John & Jane Kidd years later, and homesteaded by John & Ellen Kidd as well as Sib & Mabel Kidd in the centuries that followed. My cousins and I grew up tobogganing down those hills, riding four-wheelers in the bush, and fishing in the pond. It's an incredible privilege to be part of that legacy.

We have this land in part because of a pioneer, riverboat entrepreneur, farmer, soldier, whiskey-distiller, tavern operator, hotel owner, and shopkeeper who went by the name John Kidd.

And we have this land in part because of the Indigenous people who looked after it, helped defend it from American invasions, and then were forced off of it in order to make way for families like our own.

We can't undo the wrongs of the past, but we can work towards justice and peace for current and future generations. One way we can do this is to understand our settler family stories within their full historical context. Another is to listen to Indigenous families' stories and reflect on the ways they are deeply interconnected with our own.

My hope is that this story will contribute to that path.

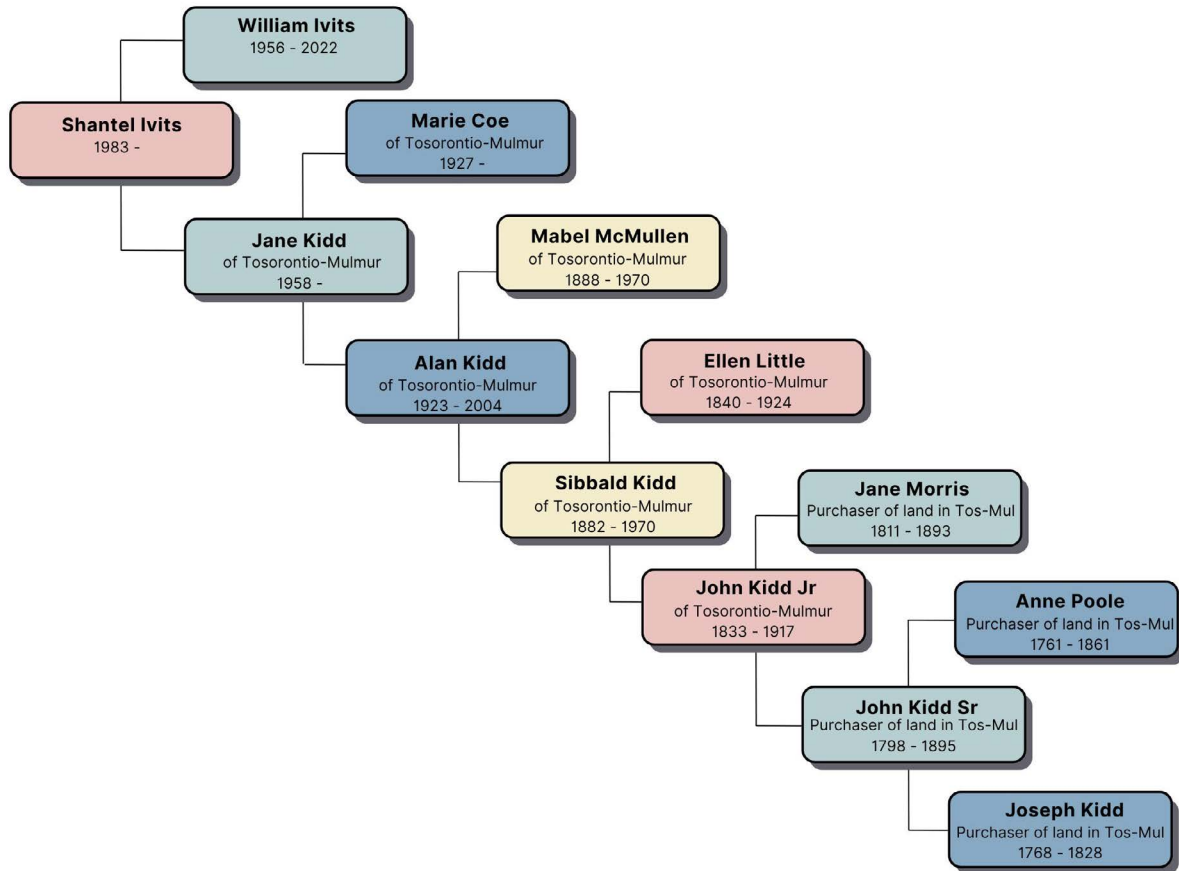


The house built by Alan & Marie Kidd



Kidd Family Land

My Kidd Family Lineage



*The parentage of Joseph Kidd is uncertain. My own theory is that he is the son of **John Kidd** of Kilrush, Co. Wexford (1737-1821), whose wife is unknown. This man is descended from **Thomas Kidd** (1710-1805) and Hannah Clancy of Coolroe, Co. Wexford. He is descended from **George Kidd** (1683-1763) and Elenor Kidd of Newtonbarry, now known as Bunclody, Co. Wexford. Many people agree that George is descended from **Thomas Kidd** of Dublin (1640-1704), who is descended from **Richard Kidd** of Dublin (1610-1670). Many people infer that this man is descended from the Kidds of the Yorkshire Dales.

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Marie Kidd (my grandma), Frances Jane Kidd (my mom) and Shantel Ivits (author)

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